THE BYZANTINE COURT:
SOURCE OF POWER AND CULTURE

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The Byzantine Court: Source of Power and Culture

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ABBREVIATIONS

AASS — *Acta sanctorum*, 71 vols. (Paris, 1863–1940)

AIPHOS — *Annuaire de l'Institut de philologie et d'histoire orientales et slaves*

AJA — *American Journal of Archaeology*

ArtB — *Art Bulletin*

BCH — *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*

BMFD — *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents: A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders' "Typika" and Testaments*, ed. J. Thomas and A. C. Hero (Washington, D.C., 2000)

BMGS — *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*

BSA — *The Annual of the British School at Athens*

BSCAbstr — *Byzantine Studies Conference, Abstracts of Papers*

BSl — *Byzantinoslavica*

ByzF — *Byzantinische Forschungen*

BZ — *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*

CahArch — *Cahiers archéologiques*

CRAI — *Comptes rendus des séances de l'année de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres*

CTh — *Theodosiani libri XVI cum constitutionibus Sirmondianis et leges novellae ad Theodosianum pertinentes*, ed. Th. Mommsen and P. M. Meyer (Berlin, 1905)

ΔΧΑΕ — Δελτίον τῆς Χριστιανικῆς ἀρχαιολογικῆς ἑταιρείας

DOC — A. R. Bellinger, P. Grierson, and M. F. Hendy, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection* (Washington, D.C., 1966–99)

DOP — *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*

DOSeals — N. Oikonomides and J. Nesbitt, eds., *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and in the Fogg Museum of Art* (Washington, D.C., 1991–)

EHR — *English Historical Review*

EI2 — *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden-London, 1960–)

EO — *Echos d'Orient*

GOTR — *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*

GRBS — *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*

HUkSt — *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*

IstMitt — *Istanbuler Mitteilungen*

JA — *Journal asiatique*

JAOS — *Journal of the American Oriental Society*

JbAC — *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*

JGH — *Journal of Garden History*

JMedHist — *Journal of Medieval History*

JÖB — *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*

JÖBG — *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinischen Gesellschaft*

JQR — *Jewish Quarterly Review*

JRA — *Journal of Roman Archaeology*

JWalt — *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*

JWarb — *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*

Mansi — J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (Paris–Leipzig, 1901–27)

MDAIRA — *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts*, Römische Abteilung

MetrMusJ — *Metropolitan Museum Journal*

MünchJb — *Münchner Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst*

ODB — *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. A. Kazhdan et al. (New York-Oxford, 1991)

OHBS — *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, ed. E. Jeffreys, J. Haldon, and R. Cormack (Oxford, 2008)

PG — *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1857–66)

PLP — *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit*, ed. E. Trapp et al. (Vienna, 1976–94)

RAC — *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*

RBK — *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst*, ed. K. Wessel (Stuttgart, 1963–)

REB — *Revue des études byzantines*

REG — *Revue des études grecques*

RH — *Revue historique*

SBMünch — *Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Philosophisch-historische Klasse

SBS — *Studies in Byzantine Sigillography*

SemKond — *Seminarium Kondakovianum*

StVen — *Studi veneziani*

TAPS — *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*

TM — *Travaux et mémoires*

VizVrem — *Vizantiiskii vremennik*

WürzbJb — *Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft*

ZRVI — *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta*

EMBLEMS OF POWER IN PALAIOLOGAN CONSTANTINOPLE

Robert G. Ousterhout
University of Pennsylvania

When the Spanish traveler Pero Tafur met John VIII Palaiologos in Constantinople in the 1430s, they discussed heraldry. Pero claimed relationship with the imperial family, and thus noted, "And if I carry bars on my escutcheon, it is because by marriages the descent has become confused, but the true arms are checky (*jaqueles*)."[1] He enquired why the emperor did not wear those arms, as was formerly the custom, and was told that the emperor who had reconquered Constantinople from the Venetians

> … could never be prevailed upon to relinquish the arms which he formerly bore, which were and are two links joined (eslavones asidos unos con otros), and to assume the imperial arms, which belong to the throne. But he replied always that he had won the empire bearing those arms, and nothing would induce him to part with them, and so it is to this day. Nevertheless the old arms, which were checky, can still be seen on the towers and buildings and the churches of the city, and when people put up their own buildings, they still place the old arms upon them. I insisted, as best I could, that the emperors should still wear those arms, since they are the real arms of the empire. Further, that it is the office which gives the authority, and not the person who restored it, especially since the people recovered the city and made him their lord.[2]

How much Byzantine history the emperor knew (or how much Pero puts in his mouth) is questionable, for he is vague about dates: he says that the reconquest from the Latins happened "some hundred or hundred and fifty years ago, or more," and he does not provide a name for the emperor of the story, who was Michael VIII.

We might also ask how much the Byzantines understood about western European heraldry, the subject of the conversation just noted. Did the Byzantines ever systematically codify the expressions of individual identity and social status, as Pero suggests? Heraldry developed in western Europe, beginning around the middle of the twelfth century, and by the thirteenth century, coats of arms were displayed prominently in art, architecture, weaponry, and costume.[3] Heraldry provided a readily interpreted system of symbols to represent familial and individual identity, and came to connote aspects of privileged social status, patronage, and ownership.[4]

By the Palaiologan period, one sees the images commonly associated with western heraldry freely adopted by the elite families of Constantinople. By this time, heraldry was widely disseminated, and it had certainly been brought to Constantinople from a variety of sources: by the Latins of the Fourth Crusade; by the inhabitants of the trading colonies in the city; and by the well-born Europeans married into the imperial family. For example, roundels with rampant lions top the revetment in the Tarchaniotes family chapel at the Pammakaristos, built ca. 1310 (Fig. 1).[5] The roundels appear immediately below the upper cornice, which bears a painted inscription honoring the deeds of the deceased. They are nearly identical to roundels that decorated Latin tombs from Pera.[6] Indeed, the image of the rampant lion is common in symbolic imagery of western Europe and across the Mediterranean. A crowned, rampant lion bearing a sword once appeared with the monograms of a Palaiologan ruler in the Marmara sea wall of Constantinople.[7] It was also the most prominent image on the Lusignan coats of arms in Cyprus, on that of William the Lionheart and a variety of others, so it had a solid western pedigree. At the same time, we also find it employed by the Byzantine elite, as on a signet ring of a Byzantine court official, a certain fourteenth-century *sevastos vestiariou*, found in the sea near Monemvasia.[8] Although we might describe the rampant lion as "heraldic," for the Byzantine audience, I suspect it connoted power and prestige only in a general

1 *Pero Tafur: Travels and Adventures (1435–39)*, trans. M. Letts (London, 1926), chap. 14. I thank Ruth Macrides for bringing this passage to my attention and for her pithy observations.
2 Ibid.
3 I return here to a subject I first addressed in an unpublished paper entitled "Webs of Power and Images of Power," presented at the 25th International Congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo in 1985, and subsequently in "The Byzantine Heart," *Zograf* 17 (1989): 36–44; see more recently R. Ousterhout, "Byzantium between East and West and the Origins of Heraldry," in *Byzantine Art: Recent Studies*, ed. C. Hourihane (Princeton, 2009), 153–70, on which much of this discussion is based. See also the discussion by D. S. Kyritses, "The Byzantine Aristocracy in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1997), 247–50; K. Olbrich, "Heraldry in the Later Byzantine Court and Society," *Jahrbuch für Numismatik und Geldgeschichte* 59 (2009): 133–48; and A. Babuin, "Σημαῖες τῆς Παλαιολόγειας περιόδου," Ἀρχαιολογικὴ ἐφημερίς 149 (2010): 109–43.
4 For a good general introduction to western medieval heraldry and its basic bibliography, see M. Parsons Lillich, "Early Heraldry: How to Crack the Code," *Gesta* 30.1 (1991): 41–47.
5 C. Mango, H. Belting, D. Mouriki, *The Mosaics and Frescoes of St. Mary Pammakaristos (Fethiye Camii) at Istanbul* (Washington, D.C., 1978), pls. 94–95.
6 S. Düll, "Unbekannte Denkmäler der Genuesen aus Galata," *IstMitt* 33 (1983): 225–38; 36 (1986): 245–56.
7 A. Van Millingen, *Byzantine Constantinople: The Walls of the City and Adjoining Historical Sites* (London, 1899), illus. p. 189.
8 E. Katsara, in *The City of Mystras. Byzantine Hours: Works and Days in Byzantium* (Athens, 2001), 162–63.



Fig. 1 Istanbul, Fethiye Camii (Theotokos Pammakaristos), parekklesion. Detail of marble revetment.

way. For this and other emblems, there is nothing to suggest that they were bestowed by the ruler or codified according to person and family.

Discussion of Byzantine heraldry usually focuses on two insignia: the double-headed eagle and the cantoned cross with four betas.[9] The much-studied eagle should probably be identified as a generalized symbol of empire or perhaps of rulership, even with vague hints of apotheosis—that is, an emblem of power and not of a specific person or family. The beta-cross …… is a bit more difficult to pin down. Symmetrical betas (without the cross) appear on coinage as early as the reign of Theodore II Laskaris (1254-1258), and by the early Palaiologan period the fully developed cross-beta appears on the walls of Constantinople, at the Tekfur Sarayı Palace, and on maps and banners (Fig. 2).[10] The *Treatise on Dignities and Offices* attributed to Pseudo-Kodinos (ca. 1347-1368) refers to this device as "the usual imperial flamoulon, that is the cross with the flint-strikers (*pyrekbolon*)," suggesting the B's may be symbols rather than letters—often said to be an abbreviation for Βασιλεὺς Βασιλέων, Βασιλεύων Βασιλευόντων.[11] But it may be questioned whether letters in an abbreviation would be presented backwards or in mirror image, while the B shape actually resembles a medieval flint-striker.[12] In either case, this emblem was taken by Westerners to be imperial: as early as the end of the thirteenth century the beta-cross was listed in the Wijnbergen Armorial (ca. 1265-1270) as the coat of arms of the Palaiologan ruler, "le roi de pariologre," but with all four betas shown facing forwards.[13] The emblem next to it, a cantoned cross with four encircled crosses in the quadrants, is identified as belonging to the emperor of Constantinople; this emblem, however, is unknown in a Byzantine context. The beta-cross seems to have a generalized meaning and was more likely associated with the Empire or the city of Constantinople; to my knowledge it never appears on items of personal adornment, as might be expected if its meanings were individual or familial. It is also noteworthy that the double-headed eagle almost never appears on Byzantine coinage, while a number of other symbols do—including the beta-cross. On the icon of St. Demetrios from Sassoferrato, the fifteenth-century *Italian* frame includes both the double-headed eagle and the beta-cross, probably to emphasize the icon's Byzantine identity.[14] In brief, both emblems are viewed as meaningful from a western European perspective.

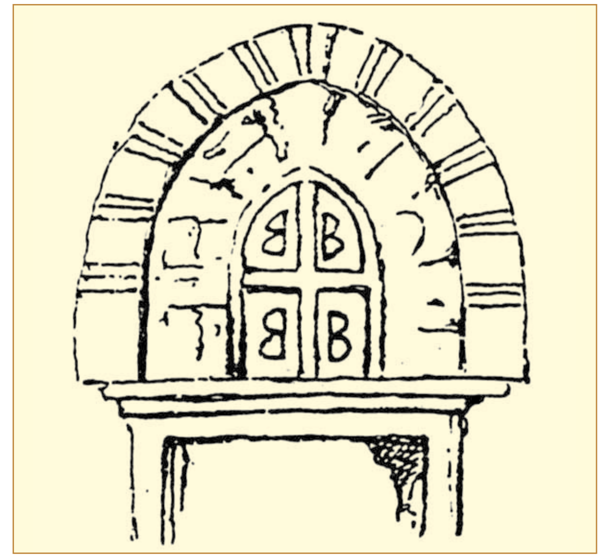


Fig. 2 Istanbul, plaque with beta-cross in situ at the Tekfur Sarayı, drawing from Van Millingen, *Byzantine Constantinople*, p. 112.

Members of the Gattelusi family, Genoese freebooters who intermarried with the Palaiologoi, often added both the double-headed eagle and the beta-cross to the scale pattern of their own coat of arms, as well as the crowned eagle (perhaps a symbol of the Doria family), and the Palaiologos family monogram.

9 A. Solovjev, "Les emblems héraldiques de Byzance et les Slaves," *SemKond* 7 (1935): 119–64. See more recently P. Androudis, "Origin et symbolique de l'aigle bicéphale des Turcs seldjoukides et artuqides de l'Asie Mineure," *Byzantiaka* 19 (1999): 311–45; A. Babuin, "Standards and Insignia of Byzantium," *Byzantion* 71.1 (2001): 5–59, esp. 36–38.
10 Conveniently summarized by D. Cernovodeanu, "Contributions à l'étude de l'héraldique byzantine et postbyzantine," *JÖB* 32.2 (1982): 409–22, esp. 415–17; also Van Millingen, *Byzantine Constantinople*, illus. p. 112.
11 *Pseudo-Kodinos. Traité des offices*, ed. J. Verpeaux (Paris, 1966), 167.17–23.
12 Such as the Burgundian fire steel in the style of the necklace of the Order of the Golden Fleece; see http://www.bushcraftuk.com/forum/showthread.php?t=15392 (consulted 18 January 2011).
13 Cernovodeanu, "Contributions à l'étude," esp. 415 and n. 25; also No. 1274: http://www.briantimms.com/wijnbergen/wnrois.htm
14 J. Durrand, in *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)*, ed. H. C. Evans (New York, 2004), 231–33 (cat. no. 139).

Fig. 3 Samothrace, Chora, Byzantine tower. Inscription of the Gattelusi dated 1433.



In a plaque dated 1433 from a tower on Samothrace, for example, they were covering all bases with the selection of emblems (Fig. 3), and there are numerous similar examples from Lesbos and Phokea.[15] From the perspective of the Genoese, the appropriated Byzantine imagery must have been interpreted as bearing a heraldic meaning, comparable to that of their own familial emblems. Because the Gattelusi ruled independently in the East, the Byzantine emblems must have been understood by them to mean family and not empire—in contrast to the icon frame. In both cases, as indeed in modern scholarship, the frequent misunderstanding of these symbols may have resulted from viewing them through the lens of the western Middle Ages.[16]

The Byzantine elite employed numerous other symbols of non-western origin in the last centuries, and these are worth re-examining. Unfortunately, although the symbols seem to have imperial associations, it is virtually impossible to fix any one symbol with a particular individual or a family. A device resembling a lattice square appeared on thirteenth-century coinage under John Doukas Vatatzes (1221-1254), and it continued to be used by the Palaiologan dynasty (Fig. 4).[17] The same device adorns the canon tables of a manuscript of a certain Palaiologan princess from the end of the thirteenth century, occupying on one page the same position taken by a family monogram on another.[18] An archivolt from Constantinople, probably from a funeral monument, has the device repeated twice and framing a Palaiologan monogram.[19] A fourteenth-century tomb plaque from Mistra has the same combination, although here the central monogram is that of the Kantakouzenos family (Fig. 5).[20] Palaiologan monograms and the lattice square device appear at the corners. A similar combination of lattice square and Palaiologan monogram appears on a reused cornice at the Mermerkule, a late Byzantine palace in Constantinople.[21] It is tempting to read the lattice square as a variant of the Palaiologos monogram, but, in fact, the symbol predates the dynasty and was used by at least three different imperial families.



Fig. 4 Coin of John III Doukas Vatatzes (courtesy of the Dumbarton Oaks Collection)

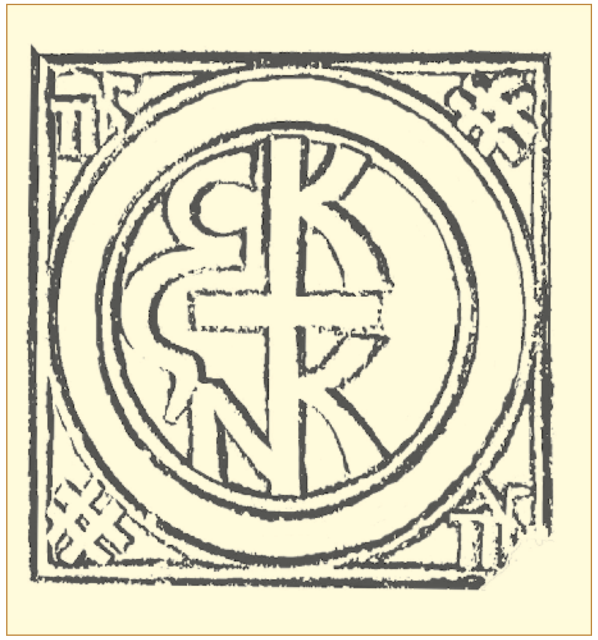


Fig. 5 Mistra Museum (originally Hypapante Chapel in the Pantanassa), no. 1772. funeral slab of Kantakouzenos Palaiologos. Detail of monogram, drawing.

15 F. W. Hasluck, "Monuments of the Gattelusi," *BSA* 15 (1908–9): 248–69; C. Asdracha and Ch. Bakirtzis, "Inscriptions byzantines de Thrace (VIIIe-XVe siècles). Edition et commentaire historique," *Archaiologikon Deltion* 35 (1980/1986) Meletes: 273–76.
16 Babuin, "Standards and Insignia," 38.
17 *DOC* 4:pl. XXXIV, AE 56.1; P. Grierson, *Byzantine Coins* (London, 1982), nos. 1175, 1449, 1451; S. Redford, "The Islamic Influence on Heraldic Symbols in Byzantium," *BSCAbstr* 29 (2003): 26–27 notes some Islamic precedents for this motif.
18 G. Vikan, Review of *Patronage in Thirteenth-Century Constantinople: An Atalier of Late Byzantine Book Illumination and Calligraphy*, by H. Buchtal and H. Belting, *ArtB* 63 (1981): 326.

A number of devices may be related to this one. On an early Palaiologan marble tomb slab from the monastery *tou Libos*, perhaps that of the founder, the dowager empress Theodora, an emblem alternates with monograms and heraldic beasts, above the dedicatory inscription (Fig. 6).[22] The same insignia appear on a set of late Byzantine earrings from Mistra, where they alternate with Palaiologan monograms.[23] And we find the same on the gold ring of Constantine XI and Theodora, of ca. 1428, encircled by the inscription.[24] It also appears on the cloth beneath the icon of the Virgin in a scene illustrating the Akathistos Hymn from Dečani—the icon procession and the hymn both have imperial and Constantinopolitan associations.[25]

Both of these devices, as well as a similar cross-swastika, appear on the *epitaphios* of the Moldavian princess Maria Mangop, dated 1476 (Fig. 7). The three devices are combined with Palaiologan monograms in the decorative arch that frames the head of the deceased, while roundels in the corners of the cloth contain double-headed eagles and additional monograms of the Palaiologos and Asanes families.[26] Surveying the contexts of these devices, Gary Vikan once interpreted them as "emblems of power and divinely bestowed protection."[27] While this explanation is no doubt correct, it does not explain why they appear in close association with, or virtually interchangeable with monograms or monogram roundels—a point to which I shall return shortly.

The cross-swastika also appears prominently on the walls of two fortresses near Constantinople.



Fig. 6 Istanbul, Fenarı İsa Camii (Theotokos tou Libos), funeral slab reconstructed. Drawing (courtesy of Dumbarton Oaks Visual Resources)



Fig. 7 Epitaphios of Maria Mangop, Monastery of Putna (Romania). Detail, drawing

19 C. Mango and E. J. W. Hawkins, "Additional Finds at Fenari Isa Camii," *DOP* 22 (1968): 181, n. 15.
20 E. Bakourou, in *The City of Mystras*, 180–82.
21 U. Peschlow, "Mermerkule – ein spätbyzantinischer Palast in Konstantinopel," in *Studien zur byzantinischen Kunstgeschichte: Festschrift für Horst Hallensleben*, ed. B. Borkopp, B. Schellewald, and L. Theis (Amsterdam, 1995), 93–97.
22 Mango and Hawkins, "Additional Finds," 181, and fig. A.
23 Angeliki Mexia, in *Byzantium: Faith and Power*, ed. Evans, 47, and pl. 18, attempts to associate it with the beta-cross; eadem, in *The City of Mystras*, 166–67. A set of gold appliqués from Mistra bears a similar set of images, with rampant lion, double-headed eagle, cruciform device, and Palaiologos monogram; see P. Kalamara, in *Byzantium: Faith and Power*, 47, pl. 19.
24 N. Saraga, in Το Βυζάντιο ως οικουμένη (Athens, 2001), 123.
25 B. Todić, "Traditions et innovations dans le programme et l'iconographie des fresques de Dečani," in *Dečani et l'art byzantin au milieu du XIVe siècle*, ed. V. Djurić (Belgrade, 1989), fig. 5. The Akathistos Hymn and the icon of the Virgin both had imperial associations; at Markov monastery, the same image has roundels decorated with double-headed eagles, as noted below.
26 A. Paunescu, in *Byzantium: Faith and Power*, ed. Evans, 59 and pl. 29; G. Millet, *Broderies religieuses de style byzantin* (Paris, 1947), pl. 162.
27 Vikan, Review of *Patronage in Thirteenth-Century Constantinople*, 326.

At Eskihisar on the Sea of Marmara, the palace block within the fortress features a variation of the Palaiologan monogram, a cross-swastika, and a triangular shield pattern—the last has lost its field.[28] At Yoros on the Bosphoros, the cross-swastika appears with other emblems, a shield, and an illegible inscription on the inner wall that separated the middle bailey from the upper bailey.[29] At both castles, these images appear on surfaces facing interior courts, and thus were meant to designate the social hierarchy within the fortresses.

One common setting for this sort of emblem is the tomb, where the earthly achievements of prominent individuals could be glorified in word and image. Marble carvings bearing these devices from Mistra, Constantinople, and elsewhere seem to have originally decorated tombs. Similarly, garments of the Byzantine elite in their funeral portraits were often adorned with a rich array of heraldic imagery. In Tomb E at the Chora monastery in Constantinople, the deceased and her family appear in garments resplendent with fleurs-de-lis, eagles, lions, shields, crowns, and hearts, all accompanying monogram roundels.[30] Here the insignia occupy a secondary position, while the larger monograms establish the specific identity of the individual. Indeed, this is the case in most Byzantine "heraldic" imagery—the emblem is secondary to something else that provides specificity—usually an inscription or a monogram. Indeed, it is unusual to find these signs without one or more accompanying monograms.

I believe the Byzantine use of the monogram most closely approximates western heraldry. Monograms appear prominently on late Byzantine coinage, seals, architecture, art, dress, and objects of personal adornment.[31] Moreover, just as arms were impaled in the West to represent a family union, so Byzantine monograms are conjoined, and through the proper reading, it is still possible for us to identify the bearer. Thus, for example, the main occupant of the tomb at the Chora may be identified as Eirene Raoulina Palaiologina (d. 1332), daughter of Michael VIII, from the combination of Asan, Raoul, and Palaiologos monograms that decorate her garments (Fig. 8).[32] The familial associations are quite literally spelled out.

Unlike the western code, based on pictorial images or decorative patterns, the emblems of Byzantine distinctiveness were based on the written word. This might be a reflection of the importance of literacy as an indicator of social status among the Byzantine aristocracy. Other symbols may augment the meaning of



Fig. 8 Istanbul, Kariye Museum (Monastery of the Chora), Tomb E. Detail of the garments of Eirene Raoulina Palaiologina, drawing (courtesy of Dumbarton Oaks Visual Resources)

the monogram, but the system of pictorial symbols was never codified—and never acquired the specificity of the monogram. The fact that the monogram was revived in the Palaiologan period and used similarly to—perhaps, in response to—western heraldry helps to explain why heraldic imagery so often accompanies late Byzantine monograms. Taken together, they would have both the specificity and the distinction of western heraldry.

Scott Redford has pointed to a similar usage of symbolic imagery among the Seljuks and Mamluks to denote social status.[33] Redford posits, "this symbolic / emblematic language of power passed to western Europe beginning in the early twelfth century as a result of the Crusades, where it evolved into the genealogical system we know as heraldry."[34] We also witness the adoption of symbols common to Byzantium in Islamic contexts, as in the early fifteenth-century manuscript images of the wedding of Mehmed II.[35] The bride Sitti Hatun appears exotically seated on a stage-like platform on the back of an elephant. The curtain hanging behind her is decorated with the lattice squares familiar from Byzantine imperial insignia. On the facing page, her brother appears in Turkish fashion, but his garments are decorated with double-headed eagles. Images of

28 C. Foss, *Survey of Medieval Castles in Anatolia, II. Nicomedia* (London, 1996), includes the castle at Eskihisar; also Ousterhout, "Byzantine Heart," n. 22.
29 S. Eyice, *Bizans Devrinde Bogaziçi* (Istanbul, 1976), 72–92, figs. 115–16; Ousterhout, "Byzantine Heart," 42–43.
30 P. A. Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 3 vols. (New York, 1966), 1:280–88; 3:pls. 450–51.
31 W. Hörandner, "Monogram," *ODB* 2:1397–98.
32 Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 1:284–86; 3:pl. 541.
33 Redford, "Islamic Influence," 26–27; idem, "Byzantium and the Islamic World, 1261–1557," in *Byzantium: Faith and Power*, ed. Evans, 388–96; idem, "A Grammar of Rum Seljuk Ornament," *Mesogeios* 25–26 (2005): 283–310.
34 Redford, "Grammar," 288.
35 Redford, "Byzantium and the Islamic World," 388–96; in the discussion following the presentation of this paper in Istanbul in 2010, Peter Schreiner suggested that the manuscript and its images may date from the mid-14th-century marriage of the daughter of John Kantakouzenos to Orhan.

power and authority would appear to be derived from both cultures.[36]

To conclude, let us return to the enigmatic conversation of Pero Tafur and John VIII. What were they talking about? As Ruth Macrides has suggested to me, the "checky" device may be the lattice square, while the betas or beta-cross may be the two links joined.[37] If there is any truth to what Pero credits John VIII with saying, we might associate the lattice square with the imperial office, and the beta-cross with Michael VIII in particular or the Palaiologos family in general. For example, the Tekfur Sarayı was most likely built by Michael VIII, and the best-known beta-cross shields come from the palace and the walls nearby. Double-headed eagles and Palaiologan monograms once emblazoned shields on the keystones of the same building, and the entire building might be read as a statement of imperial and personal power.[38]

We might also consider the emblem that appeared on the tomb of Michael VIII's widow at the Lips monastery, which actually resembles two links joined. This is the earliest appearance of the emblem in a Byzantine context, although something similar appears earlier among the Seljuks, as on the façade of the Karatay Medresesi in Konya, from which Michael may have picked it up while serving as a commander in the Seljuk army.[39]



Fig. 9 Istanbul, so-called Tower of Isaak Angelos, remnants of wall painting in interior chamber (photo: Alessandra Ricci).

The meaning of the term "checky" is more problematic. Other than the variations on the lattice square already noted, I do not know other examples of this device on towers, buildings, and churches, outside of a reused cornice at the Mermerkule. Moreover, a checky device looks like a checkerboard—that is, organized horizontally. When the checkerboard pattern is set on the diagonal, as is the lattice square, it is more properly termed "lozengy." Should we interpret the brick decorations on several late Byzantine buildings as meaningfully checky, as for example in the lunette fields of the Pammakaristos parekklesion and other late Byzantine edifices? More compelling are painted checkerboard patterns, as appear commonly to symbolic ends in Seljuk garden pavilions, as for example at Gülefşen, or more importantly on the tower pavilion, now destroyed, at the citadel of Konya.[40] Intriguingly, the same sort of pattern was repeated in Palaiologan interior decoration at the tower of the Blachernai, the so-called tower of Isaak Angelos (Fig. 9).[41]
In sum, the Byzantines of the last centuries used a variety of insignia to connote power and status in a general way, as well as monograms for family and individual identity. Together these begin to resemble the language of heraldry, and western Europeans clearly understood them as heraldic. More importantly, the insignia they employed spoke of prestige and status in a visual language that was able to cross cultural and linguistic boundaries. Whether or not Pero Tafur and John VIII actually knew what they were talking about—or whether or not *we* know what they were talking about—this was the common understanding that lay behind their conversation.

36 J. Raby, "El Gran Turco: Mehmed the Conqueror as a Patron of the Arts of Christendom" (Ph.D. diss., Oxford University, 1980); also Ç. Kafescioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul* (University Park, 2009); based on her dissertation, "The Ottoman Capital in the Making: the Reconstruction of Constantinople in the Fifteenth Century" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1996).
37 Ousterhout, "Byzantium between East and West," 168.
38 C. Mango, "Constantinopolitana," *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 80 (1965): 330–36 [repr. in idem, *Studies on Constantinople* (Aldershot, 1993), no. II].
39 As suggested to me by Scott Redford, whom I thank; for image see R. Etinghausen and O. Grabar, *The Art and Architecture of Islam 650–1250* (Harmondsworth, 1987), fig. 347.
40 S. Redford, *Landscape and the State in Medieval Anatolia: Seljuk Gardens and Pavilions of Alanya, Turkey* (Oxford, 2000), 87–90 and figs. 15, 35. This pattern might actually derive from Byzantine sources, as it appears commonly in the decoration of Cappadocian churches.
41 See Van Millingen, *Byzantine Constantinople*, 131–51.